



**Guest Blog from  
Grameen America**  
A Mambu Initiative for  
Financial Inclusion Week

In 2015, Grameen America reached an inflection point. As the fastest growing microfinance organization in the United States, we needed to completely overhaul our core banking system in order to keep up with our expansion and continue to scale. We approached this change with a clearly defined philosophy.

**We wanted to use technology not to displace the critical human relationships in our high-touch model, but instead to make the moments that we are face-to-face with our members as meaningful as possible.**

Switching to a cashless system would give us more time to spend counseling our members; we could focus on advancing our mission, rather than be consumed with shuffling papers.

In addition to meeting our data security, internal control, and core banking needs, the overhaul helped us improve our weekly meetings with members and loan disbursement processes. We wanted our staff to have as much time as possible to mentor and help our members grow their businesses, instead of doing paperwork. Critical to this process was making sure our staff trusted and were completely comfortable working with the new system, before day one of implementation. We knew that if our staff were consumed by the inevitable frustration that accompanies learning new technologies, they could pass that on to our members and take away from their experience.

We did a phased rollout and allowed for a full six weeks of training for every field officer. We trained some staff who acted as ‘technology champions’ to troubleshoot and build trust in the system in real time. After this, staff felt like experts before they began working with members. We also made the process highly transparent and participatory. Those not involved in the pilot were encouraged to aggressively question staff in the pilot branches regarding all aspects of the system—good, bad, or ugly—and make suggestions for improvements or raise concerns. We took all suggestions seriously and made them available for all staff to see. We sent out frequent update emails to all staff, not just the

pilot branches, detailing how we were acting on these suggestions, no matter how small.

**The results were staggering. The time our loan staff needed for administrative work during the weekly meetings dropped from around a half-hour to just a few minutes in many locations.**

We chose to use this extra time to deepen our impact by providing more comprehensive financial training to our members. The time and efficiency we gained allowed us to reach even more members in each of the communities we serve as well as develop our capacity for increased growth in the future. The technology provided the kind of business support we always wanted but could only dream of before. The impact was significant: we now reach more women and touch more lives, with the same footprint.

### **Advice for other institutions**

For those migrating to new technologies, it is important to go into it with eyes wide open. There will be challenges large and small, both one-off and ongoing. But with a culture of receptiveness to feedback and a phased rollout approach—including a lengthy pilot period, frequent iteration, and strong project governance—the change can dramatically transform your business. Take the time to learn how the tools that are out there can work for you and help create your desired system, not just work with your existing one.

### **About Grameen America:**

*Founded by Nobel Peace Prize recipient Muhammad Yunus, Grameen America is dedicated to helping women who live in poverty build small businesses to create better lives for their families. They offer microloans, training and support to transform communities and fight poverty in the United States. Grameen America has invested over \$760 million to more than 95,000 low-income women across 12 cities in the United States.*